

FINE TUNING YOUR WEBSITE

Michael Rudman, Dental Strategy Manager at Denplan, discusses how to create an effective to attract new patients and retain existing ones.

Whether you're currently preoccupied with pending RQIA regulations, or how your practice can recoup from a potential loss of income following the reduction of PRSI by the Irish Government; I think it's important for dental practices to continue to promote themselves to their target audience. One of the most effective ways of doing this is by developing a website.

I strongly believe that any business without a website is missing out on one of the most effective, yet inexpensive business tools available. Search for a local dentist and your practice may appear on a listing but many prospective patients will instantly disregard any they cannot then click through to for further information. The following includes some ideas to give you a starting point and some tips to ensure your site is both engaging and simple to use.

Structure

The best websites are visually appealing, informative, inviting and regularly updated. It's a good idea to make sure your website is easy to navigate, so that users can instantly find the answer to their query. Keeping tabs such as 'About Us', 'Treatments' and 'Fees' etc is a good way of keeping everything clear and simple, with nothing more than two or three clicks away. Simplicity will also help to ensure rapid downloading of website content.

Content

It's worth making sure your copy is easy to read and broken up into sections. Online users tend to scan rather than read large paragraphs of text, so pages such as 'Treatments' should be broken up with a heading for each so they quickly find the one they're interested in.

Information on websites must be legal, decent, honest and truthful, have regard to professional propriety and must not mislead. I would also consider additional information to add value to your website, such as guidance on fees, out-of-hours service details, pictures of the practice and the team and also try to include any GDC, BDA and third party accreditation logos such as Denplan and Denplan Excel.

Strategy

Decide what you want to achieve with your website and set up a system to enable you to measure its success. A simple form to request an appointment or to be added to your payment plan would act as a 'call to action' for your users and allow you to see how successful the site is. You can also obtain the Google Analytics tool free of charge, a system that helps you to track users and the pages on your site that they most often choose to view.

Search engines

There is little point in building a website if no one is going to see it. So, you need to ensure that your site is built in such a way that it appeals to search engines such as Google and Yahoo. Firstly, choose your web address carefully and be sure to keep it as short as possible to make it easier and more convenient for patients to type it in quickly. Most users won't remember the full name or web address they're searching for and will simply type what they remember.

Secondly, working with your website designer, you can put together a list of common terms people might use to find you. Then you can make sure these words appear in your website headings, subheadings and copy, before submitting the site to Google to be indexed. Take a look at Google's AdWords¹ for hints and tips on how to do this.

Hosting and updates

Hosting companies charge you an annual fee to store your site and keep it accessible to any visitors. Once your site is acknowledged you may also opt for a Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) package, charged on a monthly basis, whereby the SEO expert would monitor the position of the website and make suggestions to improve the ranking. You can also do this yourself if you have time.

¹ <https://adwords.google.com>

Expert advice

There are a number of excellent web design companies with useful experience of creating sites specifically for clients in the fields of dentistry and medicine. There really shouldn't be a need to spend more than £1,000 for an initial design and first year maintenance contract. A simple practice website visible in an internet dental directory that is search engine optimised can be bought today for much less. Providing the initial website is built to allow later additions to be made without significant cost, as your practice evolves, so too can your website. This will enable it to play a more effective role as a marketing tool for your business.

Some payment plan providers also offer tailor-made training days, which are specific to your practice's needs and can incorporate modules focused on website planning and practice marketing.

Avoiding pitfalls

I would advise that any dental practice setting up their own site should avoid flashy, long-winded 'splash pages' or introductions, as these can put off visitors in a hurry. Graphic photographs of clinical procedures are also good to steer clear of and quirky ways to navigate around the site, will only confuse people. It's also an idea to avoid too many dropdown boxes, make sure you include a map, phone number and opening hours on your homepage and make sure you use basic SEO techniques at the very least.

Website compliance

There are also some things which all practice websites must include to comply with legislation affecting all regulated professionals in the UK. These include:

- Practice name, address, email address, telephone/fax numbers
- Name of each GDC registered dentist and all registered staff
- Recognised professional qualification, certifying authority and country of origin
- GDC registration and contact details plus a hyperlink to their website
- Reference to the dentist and staff adhering to the DGC Standards for Dental Professionals
- Statement of compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and registration number

The information above has hopefully given you an idea of what is required to ensure your website is both visually appealing and effective and I don't see why, with a little fine tuning, your website shouldn't be hitting all the right notes!

-ends-

1,034 words